



Workplace Satisfaction Project Expectation Management Tools

Much is lost when a person's expectations go unmet in any relationship or organization.

The NPS attracts employees with high motivation and correspondingly high expectations. One identified reason that the NPS scores low on FEVS surveys relative to other agencies is that our employees start with exceptionally high expectations that are often not met. Some of these expectations are not met due to organizational challenges, while other expectations may go unmet because they are frankly not reasonably attainable in the first place.

Historically, most employees come to an NPS career expecting lofty qualities such as great meaning, high sense of purpose, adventure, romance, and fulfillment. They have tended to be highly idealistic, deeply committed, and eager. These qualities tend to become subdued over time by unwelcome workplace realities of all types: budgetary, staffing, political, bureaucratic, etc. This erosion should be expected, and slowed.

The most valuable tools in managing employee expectations involve early discussions with new NPS employees about career realities, and keeping ongoing employees informed, engaged, and provided with very clear performance expectations. The idea is not to quash the idealism that new employees bring, but to temper it with reality, and keep that informed idealism healthy, alive, and evident throughout their entire careers.

The fundamentals of effective workplace expectations are clarity, honesty, and consistency.

- Managers should provide clear, achievable, well-crafted performance plans that serve employees as a 'blueprint' for professional success.
- In addition to annual performance plans, workplaces should adopt and embrace clear day-to-day operational expectations. These are best recorded and disseminated in written form, so that they are communicated uniformly and easily understood.
- Mission, objectives, strategies, and tactics for performing work should be commonly understood and practiced within a workgroup.
- Clear, frequent communications are essential to ensuring that workplace expectations continue to be commonly understood and practiced
- Managers should have the courage to have honest discussions with their employees regarding the realities of their shared challenges and manage expectations accordingly. Intentionally misaligning employee expectations with actual realities will only hurt employee engagement, not protect it.
- There should be an expectation of high employee dedication and motivation in the NPS. There should not be an expectation that the employee alone is responsible for keeping that dedication and motivation high; peers and managers share that responsibility by sharing the responsibility to make the workplace high-functioning and engaging.
- Clarity as to roles, responsibilities, resources, and duties is critical to any workgroup. Any misunderstandings or miscommunications will fester and worsen if not proactively addressed.
- Once clear, achievable, reasonable expectations are in place, managers must be sure to follow through on expectations and enforce them. Expectations set but unenforced and/or not reinforced consistently are useless.